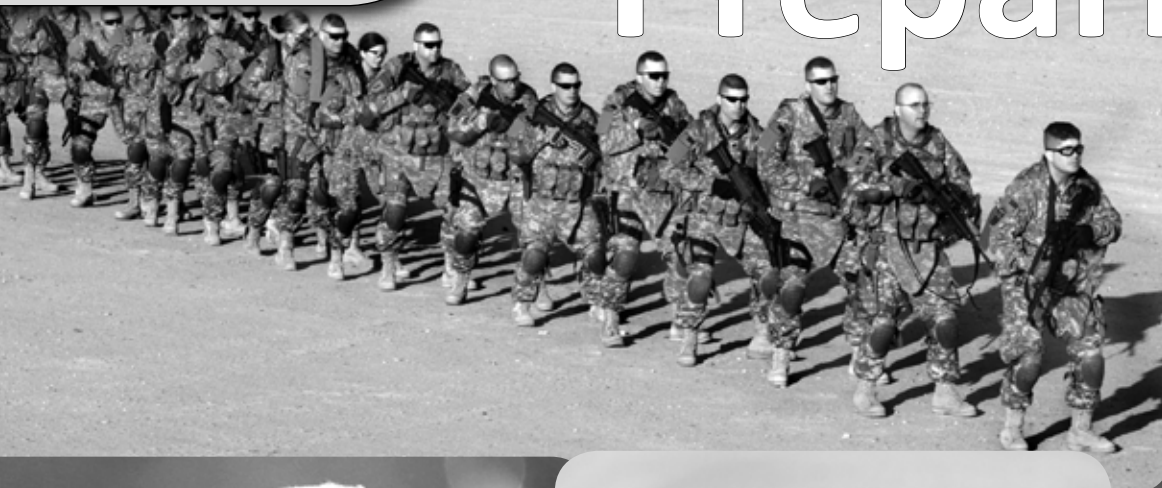


Preparing for



combat is ...



When a photographer has a name like Klika, you expect a lot. Well, DefenseLink.mil-featured Army Staff Sgt. Russell Lee Klika delivers. He spent time with his own—Tennessee National Guard Soldiers assigned to 1st Platoon, Regimental Troops Squadron, 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment—as they participated in a grueling, three-day, live-fire course of Advanced Marksmanship Training at Camp Buerhing, Kuwait, Feb. 14, 2010. The training will prepare them for a deployment to Iraq. During the course, the Soldiers were taught advanced room clearing, mounted and dismounted firing techniques and how to properly secure VIP's from one location to the next. This is the unit's second tour to Iraq in five years.

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with the Tennessee Army National Guard

By Army Staff Sgt. Russell Lee Klika
TENNESSEE NATIONAL GUARD

Night gives way to daylight as the sun, with its lurid, red glow, creeps over the eastern horizon. Once it pulls itself over the edge of the earth, it travels on an upward ark in the sky, fading from red to yellow.

Spin yourself 360 degrees and you'll see a surrounding cloud at all points of the compass, hanging like a pall where land and sky come together. The pall could lead one to believe it is a heavy fog in the distance, but there is no moisture in this fog. No need to worry about rain. It's not likely to happen, but an unexpected dust storm could sweep in at any moment.

Promptly at 6 a.m., those still asleep are treated to the sound of reveille played over the base loudspeaker. One would have to be near deaf to sleep through it.

"Welcome to Camp Buehring" reads the sign at the base's entry check-point.

Camp Buehring is the overseas starting point for Soldiers of the 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Tennessee Army National Guard. It's one of the last combat units deploying to Iraq as the United States begins to withdraw its forces.

This brown and gray oasis in the desert is also many Soldiers' introduction to the harshness of the Middle East and the Third World.

The land here lies as flat as a cookie sheet and as barren as the moon. Apart from spiders, flies and a lonely cricket, the only wildlife seen inside Camp Buehring are two sparrows and a rumor of a mouse in the sleep tent.

Buehring is initially a welcome change of venue for most Soldiers of the 278th. Arriving around Feb. 17, a plane load of troops was

fleeing a damp and cold southern Mississippi where days before two inches of snow had fallen.

Here, the temperature is a pleasant 75 degrees. Two days later the newbie's begin to suffer buyer's remorse as a mild dust storm creeps over, under and around them, enchanting them for the next three days.

Up-tempo

Camp Buehring is also where U.S. forces get some of the most realistic training in the world. Soldiers who attend the advanced combat lifesaver course come away shaking their heads in awe.

Combat lifesavers are not medics, but ordinary Soldiers trained to do the extraordinary; treat life-threatening wounds, stabilize the wounded and keep them alive for evacuation.

Staff Sgt. Kenneth McCormick said his hands were shaking as he went through the course. "The training was as close to real as you could get without having a live subject to work on," he said.

Spc. Jason Horn described the course as follows: "Imagine yourself in the dark with a strobe light flashing. You hear the screaming [loud sound effects] of seriously wounded, breathing, bleeding dummies with eyes that blink. These mock humans count on you to stop their bleeding, bandage their wounds or open a collapsed lung. The sound of weapons firing surrounds you and the clock is running because you hear the sound of the medevac helicopters coming."

There is a vast improvement in medical care in this war from previous wars. One out of every three 278th ACR Soldiers is CLS-qualified.

"Our combat lifesavers are trained more realistically, they are better equipped to treat life-threatening injuries and we have 1,200 CLS-qualified personnel throughout the regiment and that is a phenomenal number," said Maj. Steven Turner, the 278th ACR's chief of



sun d o w n d at Camp Buehring

Operations.

The 278th ACR also trained on various live-fire weapons ranges. One is the dismounted close-quarter range that stresses quickness, split-second decision making and trust in your wing man.

Sgt. John (Andy) Parker and Staff Sgt. Keith Primavera talked about the ranges and techniques taught to them by former elite military personnel.

"The scenario is inside an Iraqi home. As you sweep through clearing each room, targets will pop up as either innocents or insurgents. It allowed us to put our training into action. We had to make quick decisions and make the right decision," said Parker.

Primavera added, "The training also brought out the trust and confidence you have to have for the Soldiers beside and behind you. You know they're going to cover their area and your back."

Down-tempo

Not all of the 3,300 soldiers in the regiment go north to Iraq at once, but rather in piecemeal.

The 278th Soldiers who have completed training at Camp Buehring and await transportation call it "hurry up and wait."

Camp Buehring has been improved since the 278th traveled through here back in 2004. It offers amenities such as a movie theater, wireless internet, first-class dining facilities, fitness centers, fast food and a 24-hour coffee shop.

When not training, Soldiers find ways to pass the time by conventional methods such as card playing or surfing the net; other times, unconventionally.

Master Sgt. James Grigsby, Regimental M2 Bradley Master Gunner, said that when "Joe" (slang for Soldier) has too much time on his hands, he gets in trouble. "He will start looking around for something

to do and if not kept busy he will start saying 'watch this.' Trouble almost always follows."

While "chilling out," members of the regiment have participated in two, 5-kilometer races. Regimental Headquarters Troop's Pfc. Ashanti' Short finished third in the women's event and Spc. Jason Norton placed second in the men's event.

Soldiers at Camp Buehring also have access to the United Services Organization. They have a unique program called "United through Reading." According to Staff Sgt. Jim Kritikson, a Soldier reads a book while being videotaped by the USO. The USO then sends the book and the DVD to the Soldier's home where their child can watch and listen while they look at the same book. Kritikson and Staff Sgt. Tim Sather both say they took advantage of it.

Some Soldiers just find a shady spot to hang out with a make-shift seat and chit-chat the hours away. Command Sgt. Maj. John Cartwright of 3/278th ACR said that "he was boxing up boredom to send home."

The laundry is taken by a guy from Pakistan and a dude from Bangladesh. Some mornings, when business is slow, they can be seen playing cricket.

The food at Camp Buehring is good and there's plenty of it, and the dining facility serves four meals a day. The food is served by and international staff that would make the United Nations proud.

Indians and Pakistanis, Hindu and Muslim, stand amiably side-by-side serving meals along with servers from Indonesia, Philippines, Nepal and Bangladesh. They dress in black slacks, white shirts, black vests and white cafeteria hats.

Now, the day is done. It is an hour before sunset. As the sun sets in the west, the thick pall obscures the bright ball to the point that it can be observed without squinting. Slowly, day turns into night. 🏠

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